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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC 00231-86
14 January 1986

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: Graham E. Fuller
Vice Chairman, National Intelligence Council

SUBJECT: Attempted Pro-Soviet Coup in South Yemen

1. The recent effort by key pro-Soviet elements in the PDRY to seize power -- and their subsequent seizure and execution -- has major implications both for the PDRY and for Soviet policy among its radical allies in the Third World.

-- Information is very limited, but the coup effort seems to have been led by Abd-al Fattah Ismail, the Soviet Union's main ally in South Yemen and long-time revolutionary figure. He was ousted from power around 1977 and was five years in exile in Moscow. His return to Aden several years ago caused many of us to wonder whether the Soviets might not attempt to use him to replace Aden's more moderate leadership with a more radical one.

-- In my Shevardnadze-to-Gorbachev memorandum of last year, I also suggested that the Soviets might wish to restore Aden to the more revolutionary posture in the Peninsula that it held in the 70's.

2. The critical unknown is how the Soviets were involved in this recent attempt. It is almost inconceivable that they would not have known of Abd-al Fattah's plans to move. The Soviets, therefore, either prompted the coup attempt,or blessed it upon being informed, or decided to stay out of the fray figuring that would come out okay no matter who won.

-- Despite my feelings that the Soviets might be interested in the longer run in a more radical Aden, I would not have said that now was the best time for such a move. Moscow has done well in the Persian Gulf recently by projecting an image of moderation and has just established a new diplomatic presence in Oman and the United Arab Emirates. Perhaps they simply believed that the opportunity was ripe in Aden.

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3. We do not know how the severe fighting among factions in Aden will ultimately come out. The more moderate President Al Hasani may himself be dead, but Soviet interests may well be threatened in the PDRY.

-- An attempted coup by pro-Soviet elements will not make the Soviets look good elsewhere in the Peninsula.

-- It is just possible that the "irreversibility" of Marxist revolutions in the Third World could face its first critical test in Aden.

-- The chances are the Soviets can still put together an acceptable pro-Soviet regime out of whatever is left, but the failure of this coup attempt, whether specifically directed by Moscow or not, will have important repercussions on Moscow's standing in the region.

Graham E. Fuller



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